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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet on understanding how groups work is the fourth of 16 in a series to provide leaders in adult activities with sound introductory material to give practical help in using a method of adult education or working in a particular area. Its objective is to help leaders learn about group behavior. Eight articles and how-tos are included. "Pressures of Groups" describes some of the forces that exert pressures on groups. The basic steps in diagnosing causes of disruptive group behavior and sensitivities needed to do this are presented in "Diagnosing Group Problems." "Some Basic Issues" describes three conflicts that all gatherings of individuals face in the process of becoming groups and that need to be resolved. "When They Fight," "It's Apathy If," "Indecision," and "The Hidden Agenda" discuss four types of behavior that commonly trouble groups and suggest the kinds of underlying problems these behaviors often indicate. The final article, "Improving Group Efficiency," suggests ways in which groups may learn to increase their sensitivity to their own processes. (YLB)

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Leadership Pamphlet # 4

A practical aid to leaders in education, government, welfare, health, farm, labor, religion, industry, and the community . . .

UNDERSTANDING HOW GROUPS WORK

Help from applied group dynamics on such everyday problems as:

- conflict among members
- apathy
- indecision
- private vs. group goals
- inefficient methods

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Leadership Pamphlets are prepared and distributed by the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. Each pamphlet provides leaders in adult activities with sound introductory material which can give practical help in using an important method of adult education or working in a particular area with insight and skill.

Pamphlets in this series are:

P1 —How to Lead Discussions
P2 —Planning Better Programs
P3 —Taking Action in the Community
P4 —Understanding How Groups Work
P5 —How to Teach Adults
P6 —How to Use Role Playing
P7 —Supervision and Consultation
P8 —Training Group Leaders
P9 —Conducting Workshops and Institutes
P10—Working with Volunteers
P11—Conferences that Work
P12—Getting and Keeping Members
P13—Effective Public Relations
P14—Better Boards and Committees
P15—Streamlining Parliamentary Procedure
P16—Training in Human Relations

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Each behavior of a group member stands in some relationship to the basic issues of group organization and coordination of effort on the one hand and to the solving of the public problems the group was called together to solve. In ideal operation, each behavior simultaneously contributes to both kinds of group need. The way in which a task contribution is made, for example, tends also to bolster and reinforce basic assumptions on which the group operates. Without the task, there is no objective way to select among possible agreements about appropriate degrees of dependency, expression of feeling, and toleration of individually-oriented need meeting. And without the group process—problems of resolving basic issues, there is no scope for inter-personal need-meeting and very little motivation to solve the group problem.

The aim is to achieve integration of group task and group-process problem solving, so that each member contributes to both. The alternative of "becoming a group first" or "solving problems later" is unrealistic.

By Herbert Thelen & Dorothy Stock

INTRODUCTION

Everywhere, every day, people get together to get things done by group action. Sometimes these groups are able to move with relative ease from one step to the next until their goals are achieved. But often—between the plans and their realization—something happens to make enthusiasm wane.

Why do groups so often find it difficult to proceed smoothly? Why do they at one time rush headlong into irresponsible decisions, and at another argue endlessly over details? These and similar questions about group behavior are perennial ones. They describe common symptoms of "group ills". The purpose of this pamphlet is to help you, as a group leader or member, to understand these symptoms better and to deal with their underlying causes.

Some of the forces that can be seen if we look at groups *as groups*, rather than simply as collections of individuals, are described in "Pressures of Groups", the first chapter in this pamphlet.

Symptoms of group "illnesses", like all others, can have many causes and still look the same. Group leaders, therefore, need to be able to diagnose the real causes of disruptive group behavior before they can help their groups get back on the track. "Diagnosing Group Problems" presents the basic steps and sensitivities needed to do this.

"Some Basic Issues" describes three conflicts which all gatherings of individuals face in the process of becoming groups and which need to be resolved one way or another before the members can work together with trust and ease.

"When They Fight", "It's Apathy If", "Indecision", and "The Hidden Agenda" describe four types of behavior that commonly trouble groups, and suggest the kinds of underlying problems that these behaviors often indicate.

The final chapter, "Improving Group Efficiency", suggests a number of ways in which groups may learn to increase their sensitivity to their own processes.

While the material in the pamphlet does not cover all the facets of group behavior, it is hoped that it will serve as an introduction that will stimulate further study as well as being immediately useful.

PRESSURES IN GROUPS

AS WE participate in group life we all feel pressures on us. These pressures often suggest that we change our behavior, ideas, attitudes, or beliefs.

Sometimes these pressures are *explicit.* For example, in a family there are comments between members which imply that certain family members should alter their behavior. Husbands pressure wives and wives pressure husbands. Both frequently discuss ways they want their children to change and they set about to organize a system of restraints and encouragements for changing their children's behavior. In such instances all the people involved recognize at least some of the forces in play.

A class or a training group, designed to make the members become more sympathetic supervisors, also expects to have changes take place in the behavior of the members. In a therapy group the very purpose is to create changes. In religious groups, considerable effort is devoted to making people change their behavior.

We all recognize these pressures in groups where we are told rather directly, in one way or another, that we should change. But just as real as these explicit forces, are the *implicit* psychological pressures which may never be consciously recognized at all. There are feelings generated both by what the group does and by how it goes about its business. We find ourselves in certain groups beginning to behave in ways as though certain things were expected of us, even though the others in the group may deny they have attempted influence upon us. Even a do-nothing-care-nothing group exerts an influence, for groups tend to make members over in the group image.

* * * * *

1. List three groups to which you now belong. Include the group you like best, and the one you like least. The "like least" might be one you would drop if you could

without embarrassment. How long have you been a member of each? How did you happen to join?
2. Taking each group, state what you feel are its goals. How complete is your sympathy for these goals? Are these goals the ones which actually determine the group life as you see it?
3. What pressures do you feel in each of these groups? How are these pressures produced?
4. What would the "ideal group member" be like in each of these groups? How would you have to change to conform to this ideal? Do you feel any pressure to change in this direction?

* * * * *

Group pressures do not always tend toward desired change. People participating in a group do not always find themselves changing at all. Let us cite two reasons.

Incomplete Membership: No two people in a group hold identical membership cards. People join the same group for different reasons. The reasons may not coincide with what the group offers. For example, a person may join a religious organization because he likes the opportunities to socialize which the group provides. Yet the major concern of the group, and the one which affiliating with it suggests, is for the members to explore their values. This exploration the social joiner may resist.

Or suppose a committee is established to do something constructive about community recreation. The committee is composed of representatives from parents' groups, each major community organization sending a representative. Although each representative has a certain identification within his basic group, he now finds himself a member of the new group. He will hardly alter radically his interests and activities to accommodate the new group's goal. Yet he cannot resign without disturbing the relationship which he covets within his basic group.

Most groups combine, in less striking fashion, many and diverse elements. As such they cannot command 100% identification of the members. If a person holds, let us say, only a 10% membership investment in a group, he is not likely to respond to the efforts to change which

the group tries to muster.

Cross Currents in Group Operation: What goes on in a group may, in particular instances, produce counter currents which prevent or distort the direction of the force for change. For example, the members of a group may be uncomfortable about their stereotyped social or religious prejudices. The group may have been designed with the explicit purpose of altering the members' behavior as it relates to these prejudices. Yet, in many of these mixed groups where there would be a possibility of mutual acceptance across the line of prejudices, we feel ourselves tighten and tense up. We find, against our hopes, that we are less and less understanding of the very ones we wanted to understand. Our sensitized stereotypes have become the commanding group force. We are losing ground in our objective.

Similarly we may join a group in order that, through experiencial learning, we may become better or more active participants in *any* group. Yet the attitudes we find there may make us so anxious that we hardly talk at all! It may be that the fear generated by a process of mutual criticism which the group uses is not acceptable to us. The method freezes rather than relaxes us, and our group goal is lost.

GROUP FORCES

As you studied the three groups which you were asked to think about earlier, did your analysis of your own memberships turn up items both pleasant and unpleasant?

* * * * *

Some groups, or parts of the life and activity in some groups, are appealing. Others are irritating. Where do these pleasant or irritating aspects or impressions or experiences come from? To what forces are they a reaction? What makes us feel positive or negative about a group? What is the source of the impact which a group has upon its members?

The Leader as a Group Force for Change: Leaders are always important in the life of a group. Sometimes they make us uncomfortable by virtue of their passivity;

at other times their assertiveness irritates or satisfies us, depending upon us and how we feel. The whole pattern of a group can change when the leadership changes. Since each of us has his own set of needs, no one of us reacts to the leader's behavior in the same way. But we all do react.

There are, of course, many ways in which the leader exerts force. Feelings are set up by the *way* he does things. The tone of his interpersonal relationships is another way. The delinquent gang leader and the religious leader have at least one thing in common because of the position they hold in their groups, because they are recognized leaders, others respond by trying to pattern their lives after the leader's image. The leader may thus constitute a very potent force.

* * * * *

As you review the groups you analyzed, did you find the leader a potent force? How?

* * * * *

Group Code or Customs: Sometimes the group force is felt through the group code or customs. There are certain group procedures, commonly held values or opinions, and specific ideas that dominate the activity. These may be found wrapped up in a document called the constitution; more likely they are a cumulative effect of the interaction of the members and of the procedures which have grown up over the group's history. Many groups formalize and structure the business of accepting a new member. Formal motions, indeed, may determine each step of a course of action. Certain people may be the only ones who may accept responsibility or make decisions. People listen when certain members talk; they ignore other contributors. There may be severe limits placed upon what topics can be talked about. In contrast other groups may be quite relaxed, not even demanding membership for voting, and so on. There are groups which have a power hierarchy and a rigid line of succession.

* * * * *

How would you say your three groups rate on this category of force potential?

* * * * *

Social Structure of the Group: How the members are interrelated in any group, composes another set of forces which operate and are felt by members. Committees, cliques, friendships and enmities, factions and splits all leave waves of pressure. How people congregate and seat themselves, how they vote and even whether or not they attend a meeting may be the result of the web of social relationships which have developed. How much mutual acceptance or rejection do the members feel for each other? How "equal" is the membership? Are there first and second-class memberships?

* * * * *

As you look back over your three groups, what would you say about the forces generated by the social structure?

* * * * *

Program Content as a Force in Group Life: To what purpose is the group dedicated? There may be topics and subjects which are taboo, and these can operate as a limiting factor or as an expanding one. For example, if a group is dedicated to perpetuating racial separation, we do not find in it a liberating force to encourage our acceptance of other races. A mother's child-study club is not the place to increase anyone's appreciation of opera. What kind of a force is injected by goal-content limitations? Do these limitations suit the membership and do they provide a channel for the members' efforts to change? Or is it a pot-luck, anything-goes type of a group, where there is no definition of what changes are part of the group intent?

To sum up: groups can have within them conditions which help members to make positive changes. There may be a purposeful design for change within the total group membership, or there may be incidental factors which change only a given group member or a number of members. Changes are not always in accord with the desire of the group or of the member. Since we react to the forces that play upon and against each other in a group, we need to understand what they are. Our feelings of personal accomplishment, or our failure to change as we wish, are related to this play of forces. ◇◇

DIAGNOSING GROUP PROBLEMS

GOOD leadership operates with understanding of what a group is and how it works. A sensitive leader is one who is able to extract meaning from the subtle indications of group behavior; that is, he is able to diagnose.

When a physician diagnoses a patient he is examining symptoms. By arranging the observed symptoms into a pattern, the doctor is able to tell the nature of the illness because its pattern is similar to illness patterns he has seen before. Once he has diagnosed the illness, he can plan treatment. And so with the group; in sickness

and in health a group is exhibiting "symptoms" indicative of its condition.

FEELING OF DIFFICULTY

Ordinarily we move into the diagnostic process from a first feeling that "something is wrong." Somehow or other the purposes of the group are not being achieved, or the group is not working in ways we thought it would. This feeling of difference between our expectations or "set" for the group and what is actually going on signals us to begin the search for greater understanding of the group's condition.

OBSERVATION OF CONDITIONS

From the feeling that something is wrong in the group, we move into an analysis of *why* we have the feeling. Why did it arise in the particular situation which appears to be its source? We must remember that the feeling is a personal one, and each of us must ask himself the question, "Why do I feel this way in this instance?" Our search requires that we note the similarities and differences between the present situation and other situations where the same feeling has arisen and where we have discovered its cause. Perhaps we have come to know that when a leader plays a rather unassertive role, we become annoyed. Then when we find ourselves being annoyed in a new situation, we may suspect, as one possibility, that the leader is playing an unassertive role.

One thing we have to do in training ourselves to diagnose is to develop our self-understanding .... the conscious calibration of our own nervous systems as sensitive responding instruments, knowing and learning what situations produce what sorts of feelings within us.

We use our hunches and feelings to give us cues where to look. If our hunch is that the leader is playing too unassertive a role, we must now test this hunch against observed facts of group operation. Are the behaviors of group members those one would expect when the leader is too unassertive? Do other members perceive him in this way? Such information is required before we can accept our hunches as useful.

Observing, looking both at our own feelings and at

the behaviors which exist in the group, gives us the data which we use as we move to—

INTERPRETING THE SYMPTOMS

Here is where we try to make sense out of the cues we have gotten from our self-observation and group-observations. What is the pattern of these cues? How do they explain the difficulties the group is experiencing? This process of explanation is what we mean by interpretation. The ability to interpret depends upon our past experiences and is guided by such theories as we may have about groups and about their operations and dynamics.

On the strength of our interpretation we should be able to make a well-formulated hunch as to what the trouble is in the group. We cannot expect to be certain of our interpretation, however, until we have done some—

TESTING OF THE HYPOTHESES

In testing our diagnosis we have the job, essentially, of securing additional data. We may watch the group develop over a period of time to see if its future processes are in agreement with our interpretation. We may ask the group, in a feedback discussion, to check the validity of our interpretation. We may experiment with our own actions to see if the reactions expected from the group follow.

A MODEL TO HELP DIAGNOSIS

We have seen that the start of the diagnostic process is ordinarily a feeling that leads to a vague evaluation; we compare the situation with our ideas of what we would expect if all is well in the group. If our expectations and hopes for the group are not being met, we are likely to presume that the present situation is "bad" because it compares unfavorably with our image of what the "good" situation would be.

For these comparisons we need to clarify our ideas about the characteristics of healthy operation.

PURPOSE OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

As members of a group, we find that much of our

concern is to reduce ambiguity and confusion in the group by creating new agreements about how the problem is to be defined, what kinds of contributions are needed, the extent to which feelings about particular matters need to be shared, and the like. Only with this kind of definition can we know how to behave in a way which contributes to the solution of the group's task. The greatest foe of learning is confusion and ambiguity which has not been resolved. The psychological meaning of decision-making is action to reduce ambiguity and confusion. Either the nature of the problem to be solved is blurred, or the relationships among the members or between the members and the leader are confused or in conflict.

In a group where there is some degree of ambiguity—which means any group situation—each of us works in his own way to reduce his confusion to a point where he is able to contribute to the solution of the problem. Some of us attempt to find structure in the situation by fighting. We try to feel out by aggression or by probing where the boundaries are. Others of us refuse to accept the problem at all and either withdraw or take flight from it. Still others tend to find a partner, either during or following the group meeting, with the idea that we can thus build up enough confidence in ourselves to express our feelings to the group as a whole. And others try to depend on the leader to reduce their confusion.

LEADERSHIP IN REDUCING CONFUSION

Members work in different ways to reduce confusion. The prime function of leadership is to make these individual efforts "add up" to group accomplishment. Leadership needs to release each individual's potential for contributing in his own unique and creative way; at the same time leadership needs to develop a framework of shared commitments both to the task and to methods of problem-solving. To the extent that unique individual efforts can be seen as an acting out of the shared commitment, there is no basic confusion, and the group can be productive. When, however, the relevance of individual contributions is not clear, confusion results and diagnosis and formulation of new directions may be required.

What is needed is to define the group goal in such

a way that some aspect of what each individual is doing is seen as clearly related to that goal. In this way an individual can meet his own needs and other members can see him as contributing to the needs of the group too.

Leadership which can bring about this state of affairs makes use of diagnosis, data collection, interpretation, and testing of decisions.

THE DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS

In this framework, then, diagnosis is the process of keeping the group posted with regard to the facts about its actual operation: What is the group really working on, and how may it proceed more effectively to resolve the process problems it is now dealing with in a wasteful and inefficient manner? Without adequate diagnosis, a group easily pours bad money after good: Many a long explanation by the leader, or long exposition by a group member could be avoided if the group could see that what it really needs, let us say, is an opportunity to break down into smaller groups so that individuals can talk freely with each other. In a word, the argument for diagnosis boils down to the fact that each individual has his own perceptions of how the group should operate and what it needs next: but however differing these individual perceptions are, the fact is that they all arise from the same basic set of conditions in the group. Through diagnosis one gets behind these individual theories about what is needed to a description of the common state of affairs that gave rise to these individual reactions; and, knowing that, the group can then understand much better the meaning of contributions and the kind of agreements under which each can make the best contribution of which he is capable. ◇◇

SOME BASIC ISSUES

Experience with training groups reveals that there are certain issues with which groups have to come to terms one way or another. These issues also can be seen as reflecting basic confusions among values in our culture as a whole:

1. Conflict Over "leading" versus "following"

The process of adaptation in general has two faces: first, effort to change the environment to make it accommodate to oneself, and second, effort to change oneself to accommodate to the environment. The operation of a group insofar as it involves processes of adaptation, has those two elements. The behavior perceived as changing the environment or as requiring accommodation by others in the group is popularly thought of as leadership behavior. The behavior perceived as accepting these leadership influences is associated with "followership."

In a group, there must be both leadership and followership behavior. (Pretending that all members are leaders or that the group is leaderless is merely a futile effort to avoid this issue). The distribution of leadership and followership behaviors varies from group to group and even from task to task in the same group. Each group then needs to work out its own basis for deciding what distribution is appropriate. The issue is settled when all members have common expectations about what sort of leadership behavior is expected from whom, and under

what conditions. Thus a common expectation might be developed that some one person is to have the major responsibility for defining tasks and making decisions. Or the group might develop the expectation that one particular person might be looked to for diagnosis of their difficulties, another for supplying expert information, yet another for dealing with difficult people, etc., or the group could expect every individual to attempt to deal with all of its problems.

Regardless of what pattern of expectations one thinks is the best position for a group to adopt, the basic consideration is the extent of agreement on any one position, rather than the specific position. If the group has agreed to locate leadership behavior in one person then a leadership behavior by another member will be reacted to as an act of rebellion. If the basic assumption is that leadership behavior may be accepted from anyone, then this same behavior may be reacted to as an insight useful for problem-solving. If there is no agreement on the position, there are no criteria for guiding reaction to the behavior and each person will react to it in his own way—i.e., it will have different meaning for each person. In this last situation it is as if each person listened only to himself, not to the others.

"I'M A VEGETARIAN."

2. Conflict Over the Control of Expression of Feeling

Characteristically in any group there are those who push for the free, frank, uninhibited expression of all feelings; those who seem to wish to check their emotions at the door on the way in; and those who want to recognize and deal with some kinds of feelings and not with others. Since it is practically impossible to make a statement without communicating *some* kind and intensity of feeling, resolution of this conflict is basic. The agreement through which the conflict is resolved is probably less fundamental than the fact of agreement. After all, an agreement which proves impractical can be changed.

3. Conflict Over Relative Emphasis on Group and Individual Purposes

In most groups there are some individuals who see the group exclusively as an impersonal machine for disposing of objective problems as quickly as possible; others see experience in the group as being a highly gratifying, emotionally satisfying experience to be savored to the fullest regardless of whether or not the group actually solves or even works on problems. The middle of the road position might be that the experience must be satisfying enough, personally, so that one is motivated to contribute, but problem-oriented enough so that one knows how to contribute.

Diagnosis, when carried through completely, enables one to examine and draw conclusions about the extent of agreement about such basic issues. The need for agreement on these issues takes priority over more superficial or instrumental needs, and as long as there is confusion about these issues much of group activity is directed either directly or indirectly to the problem of reducing the confusion. Confusions of a lesser order are eventually resolved by reference to the implicit or explicit living agreements on these more basic matters. ◇◇

WHEN THEY FIGHT

Fight here means disagreement, argumentation, the nasty crack, the tense atmosphere, conflict.

Some ways in which fight can be expressed are:

a) members are impatient with each other
b) ideas are attacked before they are completely expressed
c) members take sides and refuse to compromise
d) members disagree on plans or suggestions
e) comments and suggestions are made with a great deal of vehemence
f) members attack each other on a personal level in subtle ways
g) members insist that the group doesn't have the know-how or experience to get anywhere
h) members feel the group can't get ahead because it is too large or too small
i) members disagree with the leader's suggestions
j) members accuse each other of not understanding the real point
k) members hear distorted fragments of other members' contributions

The following are several possible reasons for such fight behavior:

1. *The group has been given an impossible job and members are frustrated because they feel unable to meet the demands made of them.* This frequently happens when the group is a committee of a larger organization. Perhaps the committee has a job which is impossible because it doesn't have enough members. Or perhaps the job is

impossible because it is ambiguous—the task for the committee has not been clearly defined by the larger group. (Under these circumstances the committee has no way of knowing to what extent alternative plans are appropriate or will be acceptable to the larger group.) For whatever reason, an impossible task can easily produce frustration and tension among the members of a group, and this may be expressed in bickering and attack.

2. *The main concern of members is to find status in the group.* Although the group is ostensibly working on some task, the task is being used by the members as a means of jockeying for power, establishing alignments and cliques, or trying to suppress certain individuals or cliques. Under such circumstances certain members may oppose each other stubbornly on some issue for reasons which have nothing to do with the issue. Or there may be a lot of attack on a personal level which is intended to deflate and reduce the prestige of another member. This kind of power struggle may involve the leader. If it does, the attack will include him, perhaps in the form of refusing to understand or to follow his suggestions (if members can show that the leader is not a good leader, then he should be deposed).

3. *Members are loyal to outside groups of conflicting interests.* This can happen when the members of a committee are each representing some outside organization. They have an interest in getting a job done within the committee but they also have a loyalty to their own organization. This situation creates conflicts within each individual so that he doesn't know whether he should behave as a member of this committee or as a member of another group. His behavior may be inconsistent and rigid and his inner confusion may burst out as irritation or stubbornness. His loyalty to his own organization may make him feel that he has to protect its interests carefully, keep the others from putting something over on him, be careful not to give more than he gets. This may lead to a refusal to cooperate, expressions of passive resistance, etc.

4. *Members feel involved and are working hard on a problem.* Members may frequently express impatience, irritation, or disagreement because they have a real stake in the issue being discussed. They fight for a certain plan

because it is important to them—and this fight may take the form of real irritation with others because they can't "see" or won't go along with a suggestion which—to the member—is obviously the best one. As long as there is a clearly understood goal and continuing movement on a problem, this kind of fight contributes to good problem-solving.

These are not intended to be *all* the possible reasons for fight behavior, but they are some, and they are quite different from each other. The obvious question arises: how can a member or leader tell which diagnosis is appropriate to a specific situation? If the fourth situation obtains, then fight is operating in the service of work and should not worry a group. If fight is interfering with getting things done on the work task, as it is in the other three situations, then it is important to know which description fits the group so that the underlying causes can be attacked.

The solution to this diagnostic problem lies in the need to understand the context in which the symptom has occurred. That is, one cannot understand fight, or any other symptom, by looking at the symptom only. It is necessary to broaden one's view and look at the syndrome—all the other things which are going on in the group at the same time.

Let's re-examine our four descriptions of symptoms, this time in terms of possible diagnoses:

if

- - - every suggestion made seems impossible for practical reasons,
- - - some members feel the committee is too small,
- - - everyone seems to feel pushed for time,
- - - members are impatient with each other,
- - - members insist the group doesn't have the know-how or experience to get anywhere,
- - - each member has a different idea of what the committee is supposed to do,
- - - whenever a suggestion is made, at least one member feels it won't satisfy the larger organization,

then

- - - the group may have been given an impossible job and members are frustrated because they feel unable to meet the demands made of them, or the task is not clear or is disturbing.

if

- - - ideas are attacked before they are completely expressed,
- - - members take sides and refuse to compromise,
- - - there is no movement toward a solution of the problem,
- - - the group keeps getting stuck on inconsequential points,
- - - members attack each other on a personal level in subtle ways,
- - - there are subtle attacks on the leadership,
- - - there is no concern with finding a goal or sticking to the point,
- - - there is much clique formation,

then

- - - the main concern of members may be in finding status in the group. The main interest is not in the problem. The problem is merely being used as a vehicle for expressing interpersonal concerns.

if

- - - the goal is stated in very general, non-operational terms,
- - - members take sides and refuse to compromise,
- - - each member is pushing his own plan,
- - - suggestions don't build on previous suggestions, each member seeming to start again from the beginning,
- - - members disagree on plans or suggestions,
- - - members don't listen to each other, each waiting for a chance to say something,

then

- - - each member is probably operating from a unique unshared point of view, perhaps because the members are loyal to different outside groups with conflicting interests.

if

- - - there is a goal which members understand and agree on,
- - - most comments are relevant to the problems,
- - - members frequently disagree with each other over suggestions,
- - - comments and suggestions are made with a great deal of vehemence,
- - - there are occasional expressions of warmth,
- - - members are frequently impatient with each other,
- - - there is general movement toward some solution of the problem,

then

- - - probably, members feel involved and are working hard on a problem. The fight being expressed is constructive rather than destructive in character and reflects real interest on the part of members.

IT'S APATHY IF . . .

An apathetic membership is a frequent ailment of groups. Groups may suffer in different degrees from this disease. In some cases members may show complete indifference to the group task, and give evidences of marked boredom. In others, apathy may take the form of a lack of genuine enthusiasm for the job, a failure to mobilize much energy, lack of persistence, satisfaction with poor work.

Some ways in which apathy may be expressed:

a) frequent yawns, people dozing off
b) members lose the point of the discussion
c) low level of participation
d) conversation drags
e) members come late; are frequently absent
f) slouching and restlessness
g) overquick decisions
h) failure to follow through on decisions
i) ready suggestions for adjournment
j) failure to consider necessary arrangements for the next meeting
k) reluctance to assume any further responsibility

A commonly held idea is that people require inspirational leadership in order to maintain a high level of interest and morale and to overcome apathy. An outgrowth of this belief is the prescription of pep talks which, unfortunately, have only momentary effects, if any, and which become less and less effective the more often they are used. To overcome or prevent apathy, we must treat the causes rather than the symptoms.

Here are some of the common reasons for apathy:

1. *The problem upon which the group is working does not seem important to the members, or it may seem less important than some other problem on which they*

would prefer to be working. The problem may be important to someone. Perhaps to some outside part, perhaps to the total organization of which the group is a part, perhaps to the group leader, or even to a minority of the members. But it fails to arouse positive feelings or "involvement" on the part of the apathetic members.

Sometimes problems will be considered because of tradition. Again, members may find it difficult to express themselves freely enough to call for reconsideration of an unsatisfactory group goal. Sometimes, in organizational settings, problems are assigned, and the members haven't enough information to judge why the problem is important, except that "somebody upstairs" thinks it is. Again, the problem may be important to the leader or to some dominant member, and the group is coerced by these individuals into working on the problem as if it were really its own. In all of these cases the members will feel that they have had no part in initiating the problem, but that it has been imposed upon them. The basic feature of such imposed, "meaningless" tasks is that they are not related to the present needs of the members.

2. *The problem may seem important to members, but there are reasons which lead them to avoid attempting to solve the problem*. If members both desire to achieve the goal and fear attempting to achieve it, they are placed in a situation of conflict which may lead to tension, fatigue, apathy. Where subordinates feel they will be punished for mistakes, they will avoid taking action, hoping to shift responsibility to someone higher up the line of organizational authority. Similar fears, and similar desires to avoid working on particular problems, may stem from hostile feelings to other individuals, or to subgroups within the group. Sometimes the group atmosphere is such that members avoid exposing themselves to attack or ridicule, and feel insecure, self-conscious or embarrassed about presenting their ideas.

3. *The group may have inadequate procedures for solving the problem.*

Inadequacies in procedure arise from a variety of sources. There may be lack of knowledge about the steps which are necessary to reach the goal. There may be poor communication among members within the group based

on a failure to develop mutual understanding. There may be a poor coordination of effort so that contributions to the discussion are made in a disorganized, haphazard way, with a failure of one contribution to build upon previous ones. Members may not have the habit of collecting facts against which to test decisions, so that decisions turn out to be unrealistic and unrealizable.

4. *Members may feel powerless about influencing final decisions.* Although none of the apathy-producing conditions described above exist, it is possible that any decisions they arrive at are "meaningless." If the decisions will have no practical effects, the activity of problem-solving becomes only an academic exercise. Examples of this may be found in committees within an organization which are assigned some job, where members feel that their recommendations will get lost somewhere up the line. Or, perhaps they may feel that the top personnel in the organization are pretending to be "democratic," and are only making a show of getting participation, but will in all likelihood ignore their suggestions. In such cases groups tend to operate ritualistically, going through the required motions, without involvement.

The same effect may occur if within the group there is a domineering leader, who is recognized by other members as making all the decisions. Again it is pointless for the members to invest their emotional energy in attempting to create solutions to the problem. Apathy may also arise because individual members are passed by while a smoothly functioning subgroup forces quick decisions, not giving the slower members opportunity to make decisions. Status differences within the group will frequently have the same effect. People with lower status may find it difficult to get an opportunity to be heard by other members, with the result that they come to feel that their contributions will have little effect upon the outcome.

5. *A prolonged and deep fight between a few members has dominated the group.* Frequently two or three dominant and talkative members of a group will compete with each other or with the leader so much that every activity in the group is overshadowed by the conflict. Less dominant members who feel inadequate to help solve the conflict become apathetic and withdraw from participation.

In considering these five types of causes for apathy, it seems clear we have to direct our attention to underlying conditions, rather than symptoms. Measures which are taken directed at the symptom itself—pep-talks, for example, may be completely off the mark. It should also be borne in mind that while a single explanation may largely account for the apathetic behavior, this is not necessarily the case. Any of the suggested reasons may apply, in any combination, and in varying degrees. To determine whether a given reason applies to a particular group situation, it is sometimes helpful to look for the set of symptoms, the syndrome—which may be associated with each cause. Not all the symptoms under each set need be present to indicate that the disease is of a given type, but if several can be observed, it is probably a good bet that the particular diagnosis applies.

if

- . . . questions may be raised about what's really our job, what do *they* want us to do,
- . . . members fail to follow through on decisions,
- . . . there is no expectation that members will contribute responsibly, and confused, irrelevant statements are allowed to go by without question,
- . . . members wonder about the reason for working on this problem,

- - - suggestions are made that we work on something else,
- - - the attitude is expressed that we should just decide on anything, the decision doesn't really matter,
- - - members seem to be waiting for a respectable amount of time to pass before referring the decision to the leader, or to a committee,
- - - members are inattentive, seem to get lost and not to have heard parts of the preceding discussion,
- - - suggestions frequently "plop", are not taken up and built on by others,
- - - no one will volunteer for additional work,

then

- - - the group goal may seem unimportant to the members.

if

- - - there are long delays in getting started, much irrelevant preliminary conversation,
- - - the group shows embarrassment or reluctance in discussing the problem at hand,
- - - members emphasize the consequences of making wrong decisions, imagine dire consequences which have little reference to ascertainable facts,
- - - members make suggestions apologetically, are over-tentative, and hedge their contributions with many "ifs" and "buts",
- - - solutions proposed are frequently attacked as unrealistic,
- - - suggestions are made that someone else ought to make the decision—the leader, an outside expert, or some qualified person outside the group,
- - - members insist that we haven't enough information or ability to make a decision, and appear to demand an unrealistically high level of competence,
- - - the group has a standard of cautiousness in action,
- - - numerous alternative proposals are suggested, with the group apparently unable to select among them,

then

- - - members probably fear working toward the group goal.

if

- - - no one is able to suggest the first step in getting started toward the goal,
- - - members seem to be unable to stay on a given point, and each person seems to start on a new tack,
- - - members appear to talk past, to misunderstand each other, and the same points are made over and over,
- - - the group appears to be unable to develop adequate summaries, or restatements of points of agreement,
- - - there is little evaluation of the possible consequences of decisions reached, and little attention is given to fact-finding or use of special resources,

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- - - members continually shift into related, but off-target tasks,
- - - complaints are made that the group's job is an impossible one,
- - - subgroups continually form around the table, with private discussions held off to the side,
- - - there is no follow-through on decisions or disagreement in the group about what the decisions really were,
- - - complaints are made that you can't decide things in a group anyway, and the leader or somebody else should do the job,

then

- - - the group may have inadequate problem-solving procedures.

if

- - - the view is expressed that someone else with more power in the organization should be present in the meeting, that it is difficult to communicate with him at a distance,
- - - unrealistic decisions are made, and there is an absence of sense of responsibility for evaluating consequences of decisions,
- - - the position is taken that the decision doesn't really matter because the leader or someone outside the group isn't really going to listen to what we say,
- - - there is a tendency to ignore reaching consensus among members, the important thing being to get the leader to understand and listen,
- - - the discussion is oriented toward power relations, either within the group, jockeying to win over the leader, or outside the group, with interest directed toward questions about who really counts in the organization,
- - - doubts are voiced about whether we're just wasting our efforts in working on this program,
- - - members leave the meeting feeling they had good ideas which they didn't seem to be able to get across,

then

- - - members feel powerless about influencing final decisions.

if

- - - two or three members dominate all discussion, but never agree,
- - - conflict between strong members comes out no matter what is discussed,
- - - dominant members occasionally appeal to others for support, but otherwise control conversation,
- - - decisions are made by only two or three members,

then

- - - a conflict among a few members is creating apathy in the the others. ◇◇

INDECISION

GROUP after group has difficulty in making decisions. Some get paralyzed at the decision point; others argue interminably over unimportant items. Still others rush irresponsibly into a vote, only to reverse their decision at the next meeting or fail to carry it out. Some groups even appoint committees to go through the same process of decision-neurosis that the total group has just experienced. Others look for a miracle-man to save them from having to decide.

FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES

Many failures of groups to take decision-making in stride can be traced to "fear of consequences." For example, will the decision prove to be the wrong one? What will others think of it? Do we know enough to make this decision? What will happen to our group?

A productive group will try to foresee the possible outcomes of a decision, but in some groups this weighing process may bring divisions and disagreements. There may be people to whom failure is so disturbing that they will refuse even to consider the possibility of this outcome. They think only of the wished-for solution. There are others whose pessimism dictates that any decision, no matter what it may be, will end in failure. These are possibly extremes in attitudes, but everyone has experienced them at one time or another. Frank acknowledgment of these attitudes can help the group check the impulsive enthusiasm of some members and the excessive fears and uncertainties of others.

Another consequence which may be feared is the effect decisions have on powerful individuals, such as a higher executive in an institution or an officer in an organization. The more unsure the group is about the

wishes of this individual or the more autocratic he is, the more the group may fear his reaction to their decision. Bringing these fears into open discussion often suggests how they can be dealt with effectively.

A decision usually calls for work to be done or changes to be made. Sometimes the nature of the work or changes are not clearly understood. Sometimes members fear they will not measure up to responsibilities growing out of the decision. These consequences may cause the group to avoid decisions by working on tangential problems.

Sometimes "fear of consequences" means no more than that the group is not ready to reach a decision because it has not formulated the issue in terms that lead to a decision, or that it has not done the hard brain-work preliminary to a good decision.

CONFLICTING LOYALTIES

People are usually members of a number of groups. Frequently this multiple membership creates problems of divided loyalties. A member may ask himself:

"What will the other group think of me when they hear of this decision?"

"What position would the other group want me to take on this issue?"

Rarely will all group members face a problem of conflicting loyalties at the same time. But even a few members having hidden-agenda items can cause great difficulty. A great help toward successful solution is a group atmosphere where it is possible to bring these conflicts out on the table without threat to the individual. Then there can be compromise. The rest of the group can help the individual who is bridging two groups to test whether the differences are really basic or merely surface conflicts that can be adjusted. Or he may be helped to see how his conflicting loyalties are creating difficulties for the present group. With this understanding he may be better able to resolve his conflict.

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

In groups of any size personal differences occur which provoke feelings among members, sometimes of affection; often of antipathy.

For instance, a member may support a proposal made by someone he likes or wishes to please, even though the proposal is not a good one. On the other hand, a member may try very hard to keep the rest of the group from agreeing with the ideas or attitudes of a particular member whom he personally dislikes or who threatens his security or position or purposes.

It is difficult to separate interpersonal conflict over logical points from conflict growing out of like or dislike, feelings of threat and insecurity or needs to please power figures. Usually any conflict contains elements of logic and elements of emotion. The problem for the group is to accept disagreement when it largely grows out of differences of opinion, and to recognize as a more destructive kind of conflict that which basically springs from interpersonal hostility and uses a thin veneer of logic as a covering. The first kind of conflict can be healthy for a group. The second usually destroys group cohesiveness and leads toward distorted decisions.

It is often possible for some clear-thinking individual who feels no personal dislike or prejudice toward conflicting members to bring his understanding of the real problem into bolder relief. This member role is a crucial one for a group. Whether interpersonal conflict deals primarily with the issue or with personal antipathy, it does no good to try to bury it or pretend it doesn't exist. The successful leader tries to develop an atmosphere where conflict on the issue is seen as a part of the decision-making process and where conflict based on interpersonal hostility can be recognized and dealt with as objectively as possible.

METHODOLOGICAL BLUNDERING

Methodology has only recently been recognized as a real problem in group decision-making. The techniques which the group uses will aid or hinder effective decision-making.

A group may be so bound by rigid procedures that there is little chance for free expression of real differences of opinion. Consequently, ideas may be put up for final decision while differences still exist among members. The group therefore denies itself a clear image of the

problem. Then again, the group may swing too far to the other side. So much informality and laxity in methods and procedures may prevail that once again individual differences may be hidden or unexpressed.

Another difficulty is that the group may not know the techniques of collecting data that are needed for them to act wisely in making decisions. When data are inadequate, personal opinions take their place. In turn, a clash of opinions may lead each protagonist to make up, or pull out of context, data that support his position. Before long the group has moved to a position based upon inadequate analysis of false or insufficient data. Data collection often involves hard work, but it can also be an exciting experience for groups. If members themselves work out their own assignments to collect specific information to bring to the group for consideration, the results may produce more satisfactory decisions as well as a closer spirit of group unity.

Probably the most important methodological error in group decision-making is to assume that the final vote is representative of the consensus of opinion of the group. Rather than getting full participation, a member may seek out others who agree with him and avoid contacting those who may disagree. When such a member feels he has enough others in agreement to swing the whole group, he may call for an immediate vote and "railroad" his ideas through. The opinions of those who disagree, or who have not formed their ideas as quickly, are ignored.

If the method used in the group stresses majority-minority determination, and if the approach of group members is that of winning enough votes to support their position, then consensus will seldom be possible. Decisions will be basically those made by 51 per cent of the group. On the other hand, if a group approaches a problem with the attitude of wanting to explore the issues, collect and assess necessary information and arrive at the best possible conclusion, it is likely that the group members will work together and ultimately arrive at common agreement.

Sometimes two irreconcilable positions may emerge and consensus doesn't seem possible within the practical limits of time. In these cases a majority-minority method

may be the only possible one. But it should be preceded by as much free expression of opinions and ideas, accompanied by clear statements of the issues, as time allows.

INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP

Decision-making is a difficult and responsible task. Good leadership is needed both during the process and at the point of decision-making. While the leader may *guide* the deliberations of the group from one channel to another, he will fall short of supplying effective leadership if he *restricts* group thinking by coercing members into accepting his personal ideas or those of his "pets." The leader may make his greatest contribution by creating an atmosphere permitting free expression of opinion and unity of purpose.

At the same time, a good leader provides assistance in selecting appropriate methods of work. He *suggests*, not forces, the use of procedures and techniques which might aid in effective decision-making. He *guides* the group along lines to provide a happy compromise between the harmful rigidity and laxity discussed before.

A leader may fail if he is not aware of the motivations and standards of his group. If he is unaware of the reasons others think as they do, he is often unable to guide the group in such a way that the needs of each member are satisfied. Developing sensitivity to the forces which cause difficulties in making decisions—fear of consequences, conflicting loyalties, interpersonal conflicts, methodological inadequacies, etc.—may provide the leader with the basis for action which does meet group needs. Some of the problems that groups face as they go about making decisions are easy to identify and easy to deal with. Others represent difficulties hard to see and harder to manage. But the belief that decision-making can be achieved in terms of routine, mechanical techniques or "magical rules of thumb" is rapidly disappearing. In its place, the more realistic notion is gaining ground that social agreement is a genuine human accomplishment to be developed rather than assumed. Once achievement of genuine group agreement comes to be experienced and valued, men will have come to respect one another in the fullest sense of the term. ◇◇

THE HIDDEN AGENDA

THE main reason for people coming together and forming a group is that there is a publicly stated, agreed-on task to be accomplished. This is the surface, or public agenda. It may be a program, a task, an objective. But below the surface there are quite apt to be hidden agendas which the group probably does not openly recognize.

Each agenda level affects the other. When a group is proceding successfully on its surface agenda with a sense of accomplishment and group unity, it is evident that major hidden agendas have either been settled, are being handled as the surface agenda is being worked on, or have been temporarily put to sleep. Let the group reach a crisis on its surface agenda and run into difficulties, however, and somnolent hidden agendas come awake.

Groups can work hard on either or both agendas. A group frequently spends endless time getting nowhere on its surface agenda, seemingly running away from its task, and yet, at the end, gives the impression of a hard-working group. Often group members leave a meeting saying, "Well, we got somewhere at last." Yet, if asked where they got, they would have mentioned some relatively trivial decisions on the surface level. What they were really saying was that some very important hidden agendas had been solved.

A group may have been working hard without visible movement on its appointed task. Suddenly it starts to move efficiently on its surface task and in a short time brings it to an adequate conclusion. The group had to clear its hidden agenda out of its way before it could go to work on its obvious job.

Hidden agendas are neither better nor worse than surface agendas. Rather they represent all of the individual and group problems that differ from the surface group job and therefore may get in the way of the orderly solving of the surface agenda. They may be conscious or unconscious

for the member or for the group. They are not to be blamed or damned.

Burying them does little good. Pretending that they, like country cousins, are unrelated to the group is equally ineffective. They are important, because they concern the group, and something needs to be done about them. The answer may be to solve them or to shelve them.

Groups, fortunately, can work on both agenda levels at the same time. What is needed is improvement in effective ways of working on hidden agendas as well as on the surface agenda. The first step toward greater effectiveness is to recognize the kinds and sources of hidden agendas.

Hidden agendas can be held by:

1. GROUP MEMBERS
2. THE LEADER
3. THE GROUP ITSELF

Each of these, in turn, can be divided in terms of the cause of the hidden agenda held and the person or group unit to which its actions are directed.

THE MEMBERS

While the group may be struggling for an acceptable solution to its problem, some members may have brought answers in their hip-pockets. Obviously a hip-pocket answer is usually not acceptable to a group because it implies that one individual stands to gain, somehow, more than the rest, and because it implies that the individual, by himself, is much more competent than the group. So the individuals with hip-pocket answers wait until they judge the time is appropriate for them to have just thought of a good idea. If their minds are pretty well closed to any other solution but their own, and if they are intent on watching the group discussion to find the best time to enter their solution, they are probably not the best contributing members of the group. Their hidden agendas are definitely affecting the group.

In back of some group members stand invisible companions. They, with the particular group member, belong to some other group and they are present to make certain their representative fights for the special interest of their group. The fact that these invisible companions are pres-

ent only in the mind of the group member makes them no less effective in controlling his behavior in the present group.

So some group members are torn by divided loyalties. They are members of two groups at the same time. So long as the groups follow the same path, there is no conflict. Let the paths divide and the individual must try to bring them together or be forced to choose between them. The individual may change from a flexible, cooperative group member to one who is more tense as he tries to push the group toward a point to which it doesn't particularly want to go. To the group which doesn't know of the hidden conflict of divided loyalties, the behavior of the individual may seem suddenly incomprehensible.

As a group moves toward the solution of its task, it may suddenly threaten some group member and make him fearful. Perhaps a staff group is about to make a decision that threatens to bring criticism to the job area of one individual. Perhaps a group is approaching a decision that makes one group member fear he will have difficulty in defending his colleagues in another group. Perhaps the class discussion, in high school or college, is approaching the point beyond which the group member has studied. Perhaps the group discussion of intellectual ideas is beginning to challenge certain long-held beliefs of a group member—beliefs he doesn't want to re-examine. For differing reasons these individuals would hesitate to state their fears. Nevertheless, these fears are going to become dominant hidden forces causing members to try to change the group's direction, irrespective of the logic or desirability of the path the group is taking.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE LEADER

Each individual possibly has a special set of hidden agendas concerning the leader.

He may compete with the leader for influence on the group. Obviously he cannot state his purpose—he may not even be aware of it. He would have to make denial if it were brought up. But his hidden agenda comes through in a variety of indirect ways. He may challenge what the leader has said at some point. (There is a definite but not always easily recognizable difference between the legitimate member challenge of a mistake by the leader, and

the challenge that has for its purpose the destruction of the leader.) Usually the competing member waits until he senses the group is reluctant to follow the leader, and so his challenge is more likely to gain group support. By directing questions at various other group members, he may try to direct discussion back to himself, and so, for a while, control the group. By suggesting acceptable solutions to group impasses, or by making procedural suggestions, he may try to prove himself more important to the group than is the leader. He is usually content that the designated leader retain the title so long as the group is largely influenced and controlled by him.

He may, as another type of hidden agenda, feel generally hostile to all leaders. This hostility, usually unconscious, probably has grown out of childhood experiences with his father, school teachers, church leaders, etc. One difference between attack on leadership growing out of such hostility toward leadership and attack growing out of desire to take over leadership is that hostility to leadership does not always lead the individual to desire to dominate the group himself. He may be more concerned with attacking leadership wherever found.

On the other hand, childhood experiences lead some individuals generally to seek to be dependent on leadership. For these people there is greater satisfaction when they can find and cling to a person who assumes leadership responsibilities. Their hidden agenda is to maintain the comfortable state of dependence and their group contributions are affected by the degree of attack upon the leader and the extent of group acceptance of the leader.

On the conscious level, individuals may have certain hidden agendas in relation to the leader. If he is seen as likely to make possible the acceptance of a solution favorable to them, they will support him. He may equally well be rejected if the individuals feel he endangers the solution desired by them.

Most people have no great hostility toward leadership or overwhelming need to compete for leadership. Furthermore, the hidden agendas toward leadership are seldom clear cut. A number may be present, to greater or lesser degrees, in any one individual.

Also group members rightly need to criticize and

endeavor to change the leadership in its direction because of the mistakes of omission or commission the leader may be making. Since criticisms do not necessarily indicate indulging hostility toward the leader this article would be failing of its purpose if it made people feel guilty every time they differed from the group leader.

THE LEADER

Even the leader has his hidden agendas. One may be merely the desire, which he nobly or prudently inhibits, to cut the throat of an obstreperous individual. Another, and unfortunately too frequently present when the role of leader should be that of helping the group work out its decisions, may be a hip-pocket solution which he inserts when he thinks the group has reached an impasse and is ready to accept his solution.

On the deeper, and usually unconscious level, his hidden agenda may be that of maintaining his leadership at any cost. The position of influence and power is pleasing, and he will resist relinquishing it. One of the hardest tasks facing any leader of a continuing group is to allow it to grow up and to be less dependent on him. In little ways, as so frequently parents do, he maintains his control over the group.

On the other hand, other individuals may tend to want to give away their leadership at the same time they seek it. Usually this ambivalence grows out of a feeling of guilt about wanting to be leader.

Of course, many leaders have neither hidden agenda. They may be willing to accept leadership when the group requires it, be pleased by their opportunity to serve and to have recognition, but glad to release the leadership and pass it on. Where groups have grown in ability and maturity to a point where every member is playing a leader role in some way in the group, pressures toward maintaining the leader role are greatly reduced.

THE GROUP

Once a group has begun to form (when there is some expectation that it will meet more than once and when there is felt to be some common concern of the group as a whole), it shows many characteristics common to individuals. Its most fundamental trait seems to be a will to survive. No matter how much at war parts of the group

may be with other parts, there is usually a movement of the group itself that can only be explained on the basis of an urge for survival. A group under attack, either from a source outside the group or from one of its own members, will move to resist this attack, whether or not it is a logical criticism of the group's operation. A group with absent members will show signs of depression and worry. Somehow the fact that these members are absent seems an attack on the group—as if the members, if they really valued the group, would find some way of attending. When new members come into a group, there is a period in which the group exudes a sense of tension until it knows whether the new members will disrupt the group. When one member moves too fast and too far, causing potential splits in the group, a quiet resistant movement grows within the group.

A group is fearful of conflict when the conflict promises to destroy the group, even though it permits and encourages conflict among members, against the leader, against an outside force, as a means of escape from its job. The difference lies in whether the conflict threatens the basic group being. Warfare is tolerated—is even fun—until it threatens the basic survival of the group.

The group may have hidden agendas about its task. If the task is seen as too difficult; if it suggests consequences that might be harmful to the group; if it has been pressed on the group by some outside group or individual that is disliked by the group; if it is solely the leader's task, the group's hidden agenda may be to slow down on the task. While this is never brought out on the surface, the group has many ways of running away from its job. One pattern of flight may be that of endless discussion over unimportant details, another the flight through listing on the blackboard endless lists that could better be done by one person later. Escape into discussion of principles, or into esoteric arguments is very common. Anecdotal periods that delay work are found in many groups.

Groups develop hidden agendas about a given group member or leader. Where some one has been overly aggressive, the group may center its hostility upon that individual. Under tension from sources that cannot be adequately attacked, a group may scape-goat one of its own members. Thus groups distort the pattern of work on

the task level to fit the many hidden agendas present.

Groups can readily develop hidden agendas concerning the leader. If he is too dominant, the hidden agenda reaction may take the form of passive resistance. If he takes sides on crucial issues or leaves the group with no security about his fairness, active revolt may take place. Frequently a group is obviously following the leadership of one of its members, while it permits the designated leader to go through the empty forms of leadership.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT HIDDEN AGENDAS

The problem of handling hidden agendas in such a way that they do not block group productivity or lead to group failure and disintegration faces every leader.

Pretending these agendas are not present, ruling the group with an iron hand, and forcing it to stay on the beam have been relatively unsuccessful. Usually a leader who acts in this way comes out with an apathetic endorsement of his own plan, with no responsibility upon the parts of the members to carry it out, with much conflict and aggression in the group, or with many efforts of the group to run away from its job.

Effective leadership, however, can do much to help the group bring together its work on both its surface and hidden levels. The leader who recognizes that his function is basically to help the group at its points of need, rather than to direct the group or pull it along, reluctantly, after him, can do much with the problem of hidden agendas. His approach of service to the group should tend to make him more sensitive to group needs and more diagnostic about group problems.

Such a leader can observe the following suggestive points:

1. Look for hidden agendas that are present. Recognition of the possibility of hidden agendas on individual and group level is the first step in diagnosis of group difficulty. Diagnosis is the necessary first step before intelligent action can be taken.

2. Remember that the group is continuously working on two levels at once. Consequently it may not move as fast on the surface task as the leader might wish.

3. Sometimes the leader can make it easier for a group

to bring its hidden agenda to the surface. The leader may say, for example: "I wonder if we have said all we feel about the issue. Maybe we should take time to go around the table so that any further thoughts can be opened up."

4. When hidden agendas can be laid on the table and talked about, they are easier to handle. *But many hidden agendas would hurt the group more if they were talked about openly.* A leader or group member needs to be sensitive to this point and should try to recognize what a group can and cannot face at a given point.

5. Don't scold or pressure the group because it has hidden agendas. They are present and legitimate and need to be worked on as much as the surface task.

6. Help the group to remove feelings of guilt about hidden agendas. As groups are aided to bring out into the open some of the hidden agendas and treat them legitimately, there will be a lessening of feelings of guilt about them and a tendency to lay more of them on the table. The leader might say: "We certainly could expect that each of us might see things somewhat differently and we certainly shouldn't feel guilty about wanting different things accomplished. That is all part of the many differences that make up a group."

7. Help the group work out methods of solving their hidden agendas just as they develop methods of handling their surface agenda. Such methods may vary, but basically they call for opening up the problem, collecting as much relevant data as possible, and seeking a solution based on such data. Obviously, data relating to the individual's feelings and problems are as important as more logical data. In the last analysis, problem solving methods are needed for solving hidden agendas.

8. Help the group evaluate its progress in handling hidden agendas. Each experience should indicate better ways of more openly handling future hidden agendas. As groups grow in maturity and strength, the number of hidden agendas that remain hidden is definitely reduced. Short evaluation sessions, either the last fifteen minutes of a group meeting, or one meeting out of a series of meetings, can be very profitable to a group. In such sessions a group can look back to see how many more problems it was able to talk freely about and how much more confidence the group had in its members. ◇◇

IMPROVING GROUP EFFICIENCY

Today guided missiles have a feedback mechanism built into them that continuously collects information about the position of the target in relation to the flight of the missile. When the collected information indicates a shift of the target or a discrepancy in the arc of flight of the missile, the feedback mechanism corrects the flight of the missile.

Most houses with central heating today have a small feedback mechanism, called a thermostat. When the information collected by it indicates the temperature is below a certain point, the mechanism signals the furnace to turn itself on. When information collected by the thermostat indicates that the temperature is too high, it signals the furnace to stop.

Groups need to build in feedback mechanisms to help in their own steering. Such a process of feedback calls for collecting information on the discrepancy between what the group wants to do (its target) and what it is doing (reaching its target) so that it can make corrections in its direction.

Human beings, and therefore groups, not only need continuous self-correction in direction but also (and here they differ from machines) need to learn or grow or improve. Collecting adequate data and using this information to make decisions about doing things differently is one of the major ways of learning.

There are three basic parts to the process of changing group behavior.

1. Collecting information.
2. Reporting the information to the group.
3. Making diagnoses and decisions for change.

WHO SHOULD DIAGNOSE?

If a member of a group strives to improve his own behavior in the group so that he can make more useful contributions he will need to make his own personal observations and diagnoses about the group and about his behavior in it. Each member has this individual responsibility.

If the group as a whole is to make decisions about changing its procedures or processes, then the entire group must assume responsibility for collaborative diagnoses of its difficulties and its effectiveness. If the leader takes over this function, he continues to direct and dominate the group—leading them like sheep. If only the leader analyzes group difficulties and acts upon them, only he learns. Similar problems arise if diagnosis is left to any group member; he may too readily use this job to steer the group in the direction he desires.

Each member and the leader may guide and encourage the group toward diagnosis, but the responsibility for self-steering and the opportunities to learn and to grow must remain with the group if it is to improve its operational effectiveness.

COLLECTING INFORMATION

While analysis and evaluation of information and decision about what to do should be carried out by the total group, the collecting of information may be delegated. A number of patterns of delegation are possible.

1. The leader, serving also as observer, can report to the group certain pertinent observations he has made about problems and difficulties of group operation. However, although the leader may have more experience with groups, to add the function of observer to his leadership responsibilities complicates his job and also tends to create greater dependency upon him.

   But when the group is unfamiliar with the process of observation, the leader may play an informal

observer role for a few meetings, gradually getting other group members to assume this function.

2. The group may appoint one of its members, perhaps on a rotating basis, to serve as group observer, with the task of noting the manner in which the group works. While a group loses a member as far as work on its task is concerned, it can gain in the growth and improvement of the group.

   Frequently there is a leader-team made up of a discussion leader and observer. The leader and observer work together in behalf of the group, one helping to guide the group and making procedural suggestions, the other watching how it works.

   When a leader-team is formed, it makes possible team planning for each meeting. Between meetings the leader-observer team can look back at the past meeting from two vantage points, and look forward to the next meeting.

3. A third method calls for all group members to be as sensitive as they can, while participating actively, to the particular problems the group faces. Although in mature groups members may raise a question about group procedures or maintenance at any time as a normal contribution to the discussion, in new groups the leader may start a discussion looking at how the group has worked and what its problems are. This may occur at some time during the discussion, when the group has bogged down, or during the last fifteen minutes to half an hour as an evaluation of the entire meeting.

WHAT INFORMATION TO COLLECT?

Because of the many group problems and the many causes of these problems there is a wide range of information that a group may need at different points in time. General questions such as these may help get started:

1. What is our goal? Are we "on" or "off the beam?"
2. Where are we in our discussion? At the point of analyzing the problem? Suggesting solutions? Testing ideas?
3. How fast are we moving? Are we bogged down?

4. Are we using the best methods of work?
5. Are all of us working or just a few?
6. Are we making any improvement in our ability to work together?

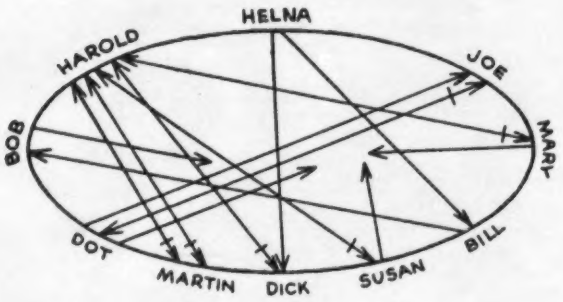
In any observation of a group more can be seen than can possibly be used for steering, corrective or growth purposes. The following questions may help guide an observer in collecting data about a group.

1. What basic problems does the group seem to have for which information is needed?
2. What is the most important or pertinent information? What information will lead the group into stray paths?
3. What is the essential minimum of material the group needs?

METHODS OF OBSERVATION

Just as there are many areas of information about group behavior, so there are many possible guides and scales for observation. Frequently groups develop such scales to fit their particular needs. Three techniques of observation are given, each useful for collecting a different kind of information.

1. Who talks to whom



The number of lines made by the observer on this form indicates the number of statements made in a fifteen-

minute period—20. Four of these were made to the group as a whole, and so the arrows go only to the middle of the circle. Those with arrows at each end of a line show that the statement made by one person to another was responded to by the recipient.

We see that one person, Harold, had more statements directed toward him than did anyone else and that he responded or participated more than anyone else. The short lines drawn at the head of one of the pair of arrows indicates who initiated the remark. Harold, the leader, in other words had remarks directed at him calling for response from four other people.

2. *Who makes what kinds of contribution*

Member No.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Encourages					
2. Agrees, accepts					
3. Arbitrates					
4. Proposes action					
5. Asks suggestion					
6. Gives opinion					
7. Asks opinion					
8. Gives information					
9. Seeks information					
10. Poses problem					
11. Defines position					
12. Asks position					
13. Routine direction					
14. Depreciates self					
15. Autocratic manner					
16. Disagrees					
17. Self assertion					
18. Active aggression					
19. Passive aggression					
20. Out-of-field					

Based upon observation categories discussed in *Interaction Process Analysis* by Robert F. Bales. Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Press, 1950.

This record makes possible the quick rating not only of who talked, but the type of contribution. Individuals in the group are given numbers which are listed at the top of the columns. At the end of a time period it is possible to note the frequency and type of participation by each member.

3. What happened in the group

1. What was the general atmosphere in the group?
   Formal_____ Informal_____
   Competitive_____ Cooperative_____
   Hostile_____ Supportive_____
   Inhibited_____ Permissive_____
   Comments:_____
2. Quantity and quality of work accomplished
   Accomplishment: High____ Low____
   Quality of Production: High____ Low____
   Goals: Clear____ Vague____
   Methods: Clear____ Vague____
   Flexible____ Inflexible____
   Comments:_____
3. Leader behavior
   Attentive to group needs_____
   Supported others_____
   Concerned only with topic____ Took sides____
   Dominated group____ Helped group____
   Comments:_____
4. Participation
   Most people talked____ Only few talked____
   Members involved____ Members apathetic____
   Group united____ Group divided____
   Comments:_____

This form can be used as a checklist by an observer to sum up his observations, or it can be filled out by all group members to start an evaluation discussion. Forms 1 and 2 can be used only by a full-time observer.

REPORTING INFORMATION TO THE GROUP

The second step is feeding back pertinent information to the entire group. Whether the information is collected and reported by the leader or by the observer, it

is very easy to hurt the group rather than help it. The following cautions are particularly pertinent in reporting to the group.

1. Be sensitive to what information the group is ready to use—what will be most helpful to the group now, rather than what was the most interesting point observed.
2. Don't avalanche the group with information. If too much information is given it can't be used. Select only two or three observations which will stimulate thinking and discussion. Let the group ask for more information as they need it.
3. Don't praise the group too much. Learning doesn't take place by being told only when we are on the beam. Mentioning accomplishments is desirable as it helps difficulties get honestly faced.
4. Don't punish or preach or judge. The observer can't play the role of God. He says, "It was interesting that participation was less widespread today than yesterday." He doesn't say, "some of you dominated the discussion today."
5. It is easier to discuss role behavior than people's behavior. "What role did the group need filled at that time," rather than, "That behavior is bad."
6. Go light on personality clashes. It is usually better to discuss what helped and what hindered the whole group.

DECIDING ABOUT CHANGE

The third stage is diagnosis from the information reported and the consideration of what the group and its members will do differently in the future. Usually this has a number of steps.

1. The members assess the observations, relate them to their experiences, test to see if they agree with the report.
2. The group examines the reasons. What caused a thing to happen? Could we have recognized it earlier?
3. The group moves to a decision of what to do. What can be done in future similar circumstances? What

can individual members do earlier to help? What methods or procedures should be changed? What new directions sought?

This stage is the crucial one if the group is to benefit from its feedback activities. Unless the members are able to gain new insights into the functioning of the group, and are able to find new ways of behaving, the group will not improve its processes and continue in its growth and development.

It is very easy for the time of the discussion to be consumed by the first two steps in this procedure. The leader, as well as the members, needs to be sensitive to this danger and encourage the group to move into the third step of decision. Although the decisions which are made may be quite simple, agreement on future action sets up common expectations for the next meeting and gives a point to the evaluation. ◇◇

INTRODUCING THE AEA

The AEA (Adult Education Association of the United States of America) is a non-profit organization founded in May, 1951, as an instrument for developing a united adult education movement. The general purposes of AEA, as stated in its Constitution, are:

—"To further the concept of adult education as a process continuing throughout life.

—"To promote and develop adult education in the United States by affording opportunities to professional and non-professional adult educators to increase their competence and by encouraging and assisting organizations and agencies . . . to develop adult education activities and to work together in the interests of adult education.

—"To receive and disseminate information about adult education.

—"To promote the balanced development of educational services for adult persons in the United States.

—"To cooperate with adult education agencies internationally."

United in the AEA to further these purposes through a program including field services, conferences, publications, and public relations, are over 12,000 men and women who work with adults in formal and informal educational and training programs. These leaders represent every sector of American society—education, labor, agriculture, industry, religion, social welfare, government service, and a host of voluntary associations.

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